

Yom Kippur Haftarah

L'Shana Tova and Shabbat Shalom. How blessed are we on this most Holy Day of Yom Kippur to worship together in our magnificent sanctuary; be inspired by our wise and sensitive spiritual leaders, surrounded by a community that cares. Soon our Haftarah will be chanted, and the prophetic words of Isaiah will help to awaken us to the deeper meaning of Yom Kippur and the essence of being fully human.

If we are able, we are commanded to fast, to practice self-denial from sundown to sunset. Yet, what does it mean to hear our stomachs rumble, not only our own but our neighbors? What does it matter if we feel the gnawing pangs of hunger, if just for a day? Isaiah explains that really it means nothing, unless it changes us. The prophet asked God, "Why when we fasted did you not see? When we starved our bodies did you pay no heed?" And the Lord responded, "Is this the fast I desire, a day for men to starve their bodies, do you call that a fast? No, this is the fast I desire. "Untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry and to take the poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to ignore your kin." The Lord decrees, "Build up, Build up a highway! Clear the road! Remove all the obstacles from the road of My people!"

Here at Shirat Hayam, we are committed to do just that: Remove all of the obstacles from the road of our people. Remove obstacles to synagogue life and provide support, compassion, holy hospitality to us all, not just on this day, Ha Yom, but every day, Kol Yom.

Our Shirat Hayam Inclusion Initiative: Shir Lanu: One Song-Every Voice, opens doors and hearts, arms and hands to those of us who are hungry, who stumble, and who struggle. In reality, isn't this all of us? Amanda Clayman and I, along with a devoted inclusion committee, are honored to work with our clergy and congregation to create a community that answers the calls and cries of us all: those of us with visible challenges, and those who hold hurts that no one sees, no one hears. At some point in our lives, isn't that all of us? Don't many of us know what it is to feel unseen, unheard, hungry for appreciation? How many of us ever entered a synagogue not knowing a soul? And how many of us entered a shul and no one welcomed us or perhaps looked away, leaving us to feel uncomfortable, invisible, or other. Let us commit to compassionately seeing, listening, and supporting one another, truly loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Shir Lanu: One Song-Every Voice. There is a Hassidic teaching that explains that there are 10 levels of prayer, and above them all is song. We all sing our own special note, and together we create holy harmony: a home accessible to all; one that appreciates each one of our voices including children and adults with special needs; those

with psycho-spiritual challenges; members of the LGBTQ community; interfaith couples; elders; and those of us experiencing financial hardship. And Shirat Hayam is not singing alone. The Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Program, under the auspices of CJP, has recognized our congregation as a Ruderman Inclusion Partner and has given us a grant to enhance accessibility for those with physical, sensory, and learning challenges. With the guidance of Janis Knight, director of CJE, we look forward to providing tools and training to enhance the Hebrew School experience for our students with special needs. Also, our committee has created a menu of accommodations, available in the lobby and our newsletters, to enable all to enjoy our synagogue offerings. Your help, support, and suggestions are invaluable as together we thrive.

Shirat Hayam has recently been recognized by United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, in collaboration with Keshet, for our leadership in welcoming all regardless of sexual orientation and gender identify. We are one of 15 synagogues nationwide invited to embark on a year-long training program to help make CSH even more inclusive for our LGBTQ members. Next month we are sending a team to New York for a full day workshop.

In our psalms, we are urged, Sing a New Song to the Lord. Isaiah teaches that the opposite of a New Song is Not an Old Song, rather the opposite of a New Song is Keeping Quiet.

Well, at Shirat Hayam we're not keeping Quiet! On the weekend of Oct. 27 and 28, Neshama Carlebach, renowned singer and songwriter and the daughter of the legendary "Singing Rabbi", Shlomo Carlebach, will be joining us as artist-in-residence to help us celebrate our culture of inclusion. On Friday evening, during our Holy, Happy Hour Minyan, Neshama will offer a brief teaching on inclusion, and during Shabbat services will lead Nosh and Drash. And on Saturday night, Oct. 28th, we will be singing a New Song as Neshama Carlebach, along with the Glory to God Gospel singers from New York, will lift our hearts, fill our souls, and raise the roof here at Shirat Hayam in a community concert. Please invite your friends and purchase your tickets on our website or you can contact Sherri for assistance. Each one of you is welcome and wanted!

Together let us "Build up a highway, clear the road, and remove all obstacles" so that each of our notes blends into one sacred song.